

Testimony to the Appropriations Committee, Human Services Subcommittee, of the Connecticut General Assembly, Concerning Governor Rell's Proposed Budget Cuts to the Children's Trust Fund

February 11, 2010

Honorable Chairs and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for taking the time to listen to our testimonies this evening. My name is Caroline Mavridis and I am a resident of Willington. I am here to ask that you reject the Governor's proposed 50 % budget cut to the Children's Trust Fund.

As a UCONN researcher, I have been involved in evaluating CTF programs. One of these is the Nurturing Families Network, or NFN. One core function of NFN is to provide weekly home visiting to families who screen at heightened risk of child abuse or neglect. One emerging part of our NFN study is to "shadow" home visitors during a normal work day.

NFN home visitors bring career, education, and life experiences that equip them for working with families in need. The range of tasks and roles they fulfill on any given day is remarkable. One home visitor, whom I will call "Diana," has nearly 20 years of experience in the field. Bilingual and bicultural, she has been trained by NFN on the latest research-based curricula, and she is able to educate families about positive parenting, safety, literacy, and to help parents improve their own education and career situations. Diana has learned to network around her city for securing needed resources – such as bedding, diapers, formula, and food – for families who cannot afford these basics. She knows just where, and to whom, to refer families in crisis. Diana also helps with "legwork" for families who are trying, but unsuccessful, in getting a response from other agencies. She works with a total of about 20 families, a schedule that keeps her extremely busy on any week.

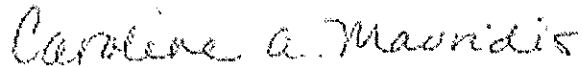
Home visitors make about \$30,000 per year, yet perform their work with professionalism and a sincere investment in their families' achievements. Parents who would not otherwise let "social services" personnel into their homes respond eagerly to their home visitors, with whom they build trusting relationships. At the end of one day I spent with Diana, she was rushing off to attend a birth for one young mother who had called her and requested she be present.

We need to realize that home visitors do not simply "give" while families "take," but instead they collaborate with families so that they develop a healthy self-reliance. Diana pushed one young mother to develop herself such that she now heads her own support group for other teen mothers, and is planning a career in medicine. The program does show results, too – other research from the University of Hartford has demonstrated positive family outcomes statewide on a number of measures for "visited" versus "non-visited" families (CTF Year-End Report, 2007-08).

Under this proposal, because Diana works for a "non-hospital" site, her position will be eliminated, and her families will no longer receive visits. In fact, 14 such sites (out of 42) will close, and the remaining 28 face a 30 % cut. In all, it is projected there will be a 59 % cut in home visiting staff, statewide, for the coming year. Without the NFN safety net, our team

projects over 300 new cases referred to DCF in the coming year. Mandatory DCF investigation and oversight cost 30,000 dollars per year, per case, in contrast to the 3000-4000 dollars per year, per family for NFN visits. 300 new cases times \$30,000 equals over 9 million dollars in new costs. As you can see this exceeds the savings of the proposed cuts. Leaving our most fragile families hanging, and putting skilled professionals like Diana out of work is unethical and fiscally dangerous. Thank you again.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Caroline A. Mavridis".

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